
2024 Association Update

John F. Kutsko, Executive Director

In 2018, I taught a dissertation writing workshop at the Alex Haley Farm, formerly owned by the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Roots*. The restored farm in Clinton, Tennessee, is now owned by the Children’s Defense Fund. It’s a training center and space for spiritual renewal. I wasn’t prepared for the unexpected emotion I felt when I drove up to the gatehouse, and a gentle person invited me in with the words, “Welcome home.” I had never been there before, but it felt both welcoming and homey.

The annual gatherings of associations like ours have typically been a chance to reconnect—a family reunion. That has very much characterized the Atla Annual conference. Like everything, it has changed over time: smaller these past years, and an online experience for many. But an intentional time and gathering for mutual support is indispensable. I hope you experience some reunion in person or online. So let me begin by saying, “Welcome home.”

This association update, like the meeting itself, is hybrid: Atla has a fiscal year, a calendar year, and an annual cycle marked by Board terms, which coincides with this meeting. My report on the state of Atla’s finances is for the last fiscal year’s audit, that is, the year ending nine months ago (i.e., August 31, 2023). But I will also provide program and product highlights from the past year and look ahead to next year’s initiatives for 2024–2025.

It is not possible to adequately convey the business and administrative details, the development of the databases, the Open Press publishing, and association programs and services in the few minutes I have for the update. Atla is 24/7. So, I encourage you to read the Annual Reports, weekly updates, monthly blogs, and regular announcements posted to [Atla.com](https://atla.com) and its socials—every week, all year long.

A few words of thanks. Now that I am into my second year, I’ve gotten to know many Atla members, and it confirms my first impression that theological librarianship is both a profession of wide-ranging expertise and a vocation of service and commitment—commitment

to students, faculty, institutions, and to the resources for information literacy that foster and preserve the study of religion and theology. Second, thanks to the Atla Board for supporting me. They serve at your pleasure, and I serve at theirs. Third, Atla is a membership organization, a public trust of its members and governed by its volunteers. Atla has 45 full-time staff, but these are the committees that govern and guide the organization:

- Board of Directors and Committees
 - Finance Committee
 - Governance Committee
 - Moral Ownership Committee
 - Nominating Committee
- Association Committees
 - Conference Committee
 - Conduct Committee
 - Committee for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
 - Atla Open Press Advisory Council
 - Professional Development Committee
 - Scholarly Communication and Digital Initiatives Committee
 - CRRRA Program Committee
- Editorial Boards
 - Books@Atla Open Press
 - *Theological Librarianship*
 - *TCB: Technical Services in Religion and Theology*
- PCC (NACO/SACO/CONSER) Funnels

Thanks to everyone serving on them, and please consider that service for yourself.

THE STATE OF THE ASSOCIATION

The last fiscal year that ended August 31, 2023, was financially positive, and the state of the association is strong. The audited fiscal year 2023 financial statements from the independent audit are available online in the 2023–24 *Annual Report* (<https://www.atla.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/2024AtlaAnnualReport-1.pdf>) on pages 28–31.

The audited Statement of Financial Position reported the organization’s total liabilities and net assets at year-end, as \$19,342,863, up \$1,077,501 from FY2022.

Actual revenue was \$8,229,018 against actual expenses of \$7,565,321, as shown on the Statement of Activities. This brings Atla’s total net assets (sometimes called total net worth) to \$12,469,747—up \$663,697 from FY2022. This has been a positive fiscal year and a strong recovery from FY2022 to FY2023.

Current assets represent cash and investments and other assets that will likely be converted to or provide benefit similar to cash in the next 12 months. The current asset level is a gauge of liquidity and the organization’s ability to meet its near-term obligations. Atla’s current assets increased by \$560,267 from FY2022 to FY2023, giving Atla strong coverage to support its liabilities. In our current fiscal year, the assets in the unaudited FY2024Q2 financials total \$10,312,864, an increase of \$1,101,487 over the previous year. This continues our good cash flow position this year.

Atla’s primary source of revenue (92%) continues to be royalties from the research tools we create (see figure 1). Income generated from Membership and Engagement activities (2%) include dues, conference fees, and fees for services such as hosting ejournals for other organizations. We are grateful to EBSCO and the relationships that support this partnership. Administration is a category that includes unrealized gains and losses from investments, and this year we’ve experienced unrealized gains.



Figure 1: FY2023 Results: How revenue is earned

On the expense side, the largest portion (60%) was used to produce the Atla research tools we create and provide through EBSCO (see figure 2). However, a significant amount of Atla’s expenses—more than nine times the revenue—is focused on fulfilling the mission of the association. Last year this was 19%, which is also higher than the previous year. This includes funding committee work, open access publishing, Membership and Engagement staff, and professional development opportunities for our members, such as this conference and our webinar series. Board and governance work, as well as much of the administration costs, are also really the work of the organization’s ends.



Figure 2: FY2023 Results: How revenue is spent

Total investment—including the endowment, operating reserve, and other non-endowed funds—grew from \$6,843,934 at May 2023 to \$7,854,138 at May 2024—that is, just over \$1,000,000 (see table 1). This growth is largely due to increases in market valuation of the holdings and realized investment income. Nevertheless, the allocations allowed now by the new investment policy have significantly helped.

Table 1: Total Investments

	MAY 31, 2024	MAY 31, 2023
16-1233 (OTHER NON-ENDOWED FUNDS)		
Cash Equivalents	\$2,648,656.62	\$1,651,263.61
Equities	-	\$1,291,666.06

Fixed Income	\$1,060,477.78	\$2,807,088.91
Alternatives	-	\$22,972.32
TOTAL FUND	\$3,709,134.40	\$5,772,990.90
16-1233A (ENDOWED FUNDS)		
Cash Equivalents	\$102,072.07	\$86,543.47
Equities	\$1,356,391.30	\$984,400.10
Fixed Income	-	-
Alternatives	-	-
TOTAL FUND	\$1,458,463.37	\$1,070,943.57
16-1233B (OPERATING RESERVE)		
Cash Equivalents	\$51,442.79	-
Equities	\$1,625,548.07	-
Fixed Income	\$982,421.66	-
Alternatives	\$27,127.80	-
TOTAL FUND	\$2,686,540.32	-
ALL FUNDS		
Cash Equivalents	\$2,802,171.48	\$1,737,807.08
Equities	\$2,981,939.37	\$2,276,066.16
Fixed Income	\$2,042,899.44	\$2,807,088.91
Alternatives	\$27,127.80	\$22,972.32
TOTAL ALL FUNDS	\$7,854,138.09	\$6,843,934.47

As of June, Atla has 742 members in 28 different countries. Membership is down in most categories from FY2023 to FY2024 as shown in table 2. This trend for peer library associations and learned societies, too, is not unique to Atla, but it is an issue for concern.

Table 2: Atla membership trends (FY2015–2024)

	FY15	FY16	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24 YTD
INDIVIDUAL	367	377	368	346	330	336	350	367	382	341
LIFETIME	88	91	97	94						
RETIRED					22	24	25	18	19	17
EMERITUS					75	71	20	13	12	4
STUDENT	80	45	57	69	86	71	85	92	90	53
INSTITUTIONAL	234	239	263	285	294	292	291	301	304	306
AFFILIATE	62	61	47	32	23	22	23	23	13	9
INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL	10	10								
TOTAL MEMBERS	843	828	832	826	830	816	794	814	820	730

THE IMPACT OF THE ASSOCIATION

If you've read my blogs, you will have seen that I have a sober and realistic view of the pressures we face in theological education at seminaries and divinity schools, and the study of religion at colleges and universities. But here is the thing: Religion is not a siloed field. It doesn't exist in a vacuum. It isn't supposed to be cloistered and studied in isolation from its comprehensive impact on lives, communities, culture, and society. How religion is studied may be variable, but the need for understanding it is constant. This fact plays to our strengths: an association providing community and professional development for theological librarians, and the tools your faculty and students need to study religion in its historical, interdisciplinary, and evolving ways.

You have also seen in my blogs a theme that I deeply believe in. It is about Atla's capacious future: *Religion is Everywhere*. Religion is Everywhere *in Society*. What an opportunity for the vital and essential role of theological librarianship and the resources we can provide any and every field!

With this message, in 2023 we began working closely with EBSCO's marketing team to demonstrate that the databases support the study of religion across a campus, not just in a department, and they serve theological education in the new ways students want to study it or to practice it—often outside congregational ministry.

Atlas PLUS® especially leads the way in providing a tool for students and faculty that is interdisciplinary, multilingual, and multireligious, that includes a diversity of perspectives and approaches. I hope you had the chance to read the June blog by Maria Stanton and the new horizons we reach with it. As Maria says, “comprehending the role of religion in shaping society is essential,” and Atla has a research tool for the “comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted role of religion in society” (<https://www.atla.com/blog/religion-society-atlas-journey-and-new-horizons/>). In other words, it’s now the database to study not just religion but religion *and* society. A tool like this deepens and broadens the role and context of the theological librarian, because you become the guides helping navigate the intersection of religion with a variety of disciplines and professions.

This year the Membership and Engagement staff implemented a new membership opportunity—membership bundling—and 67 institutions, or 22.3% of all institutional members, have chosen to take advantage of it so far. One of the goals of membership bundling was to increase the number of new individual members, and that seems to be succeeding, since 43 of the 109 individual members associated with a membership bundle (43%) are newly joined members. Other goals of bundling were to give Atla a clear line of communication to library staff who are not the official representative for a member institution, to increase the number of individuals receiving regular communications from Atla, and to help them benefit from Atla through grant and professional development programs they may not have been aware of.

In addition to these product and membership points of emphasis, I want to note some other accomplishments this year that involve both the Membership and Engagement team and Product Development and Production team, often working closely together: the launch of the Institutional Repository service, continued indexing and transcribing of Day1 sermons for the Christian Media Alliance, and both the support and integration into Atla of the Catholic Research Resources Alliance programing and its Catholic News Archive and Catholic Portal.

This year, too, to support our accountability to members on the impact staff is making to achieve the new Organizational Ends that the board approved, we distributed a survey in April. This survey was

the outgrowth of goals we set last year toward two efforts: one, provide data that inform Key Performance Indicators to hold ourselves accountable to what you, the members, want Atla to accomplish; and second, to work more closely with the board's Moral Ownership Committee to draft the questions so that we understand together what members need from Atla. This will become an annual survey, so that we can observe trends in our performance as well as new challenges and opportunities.

In addition to the member satisfaction survey, we are also collaborating with our international partners on a global demographic survey. This survey will support a study of religion and theology library trends. It is designed to help understand the environment in which theological libraries are functioning, and how librarianship is evolving to meet the changing landscape of theological education around the globe. This year we collaborated with ANZTLA in Australia and New Zealand, and BETH in Europe, to develop the study questions, and we will work together to analyze and report results on a global as well as regional level. Following the survey, we will work with In Trust to conduct focus groups in various parts of the world. We plan to widen the collaboration with more international library association peers next year, particularly in the Majority World.

THE FUTURE OF THE ASSOCIATION

Finally, along with the international survey and study, which points ahead to next year, I want to mention two more projects the Atla staff is focused on.

One is something I also mentioned last year and toward which we have made good progress. We are in the process of building an open and federated discovery platform that cross-searches a wide range of materials, including a significant number of open access resources, archives and special collections, and institutional histories. It will be a federated search solution designed to support theological education, interdisciplinary research, preaching, and teaching, and especially to make discoverable the at-risk and underrepresented histories that fully reflect the diversity of contributions in religion and theology on society. Stay tuned for more about this project.

Second, we are actively exploring new products that support the intersection of religion in professional areas. What appears to be most promising is a database for studying the rapidly growing field in which Religion and Spirituality intersect with Medicine and Healthcare Chaplaincy. We worked with a consultant on a case statement and proposal, and we are now in the fundraising stage for a planning grant to methodically determine the business case and market for such a resource. We are now budgeting for FY2025 (our fiscal year begins September 1), and both efforts I just mentioned are being built into it.

Thanks for your time and attention. Please feel free anytime to ask anything more about this year, our plans for next, or comments or concerns. I am at your service.

